

Message Text

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PAGE 01 GUATEM 04252 111831Z

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UNCLAS GUATEMALA 4252

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TAGS: EAGR, GT

SUBJECT: MOISTURE SHORTAGE WORSENS CORN SITUATION

REF: GUATEMALA 4122

SUMMARY: PRESS RECENTLY HAS BEEN REPORTING THAT DROUGHT EXISTS IN PETEN AND IN EASTERN GUATEMALA CLOSE TO HONDURAS BORDER. THIS WORSENS GRAIN CRISIS REORTED REFTEL AND, WITH LATER-THAN-NORMAL HARVEST ANTICIPATED, ADDITIONAL CORN IMPORTS ARE POSSIBILITY IN NEAR FUTURE. OFFICE OF AGATT HAS SURVEYED GRAIN SITUATION AND WILL REPORT TO AGRIC/FAS AUGUST 11 IN GT-5021. PRESENT INDICATIONS, DESPITE PAST LACK OF RAINFALL IN PARTS OF GUATEMALA, INDICATE 10 PERCENT INCREASE CORN PRODUCTION OVER LAST SEASON, PERHAPS TO 770,000 METRIC TONS. GOG OPTIMISTICALLY PREDICTS 100,000 TONS MORE. END SUMMARY.

1. BECAUSE OF VARIETY OF CLIMATES AND ALTITUDES, GUATEMALA'S CORN HARVEST BEGINS JULY-AUGUST ON PACIFIC LOWLANDS AND CONTINUES THROUGH DECEMBER-JANUARY IN NORTH-CENTRAL HIGHLANDS. LOW STOCKS AND ELEVATED DOMESTIC PRICES GREETED FIRST SCANTY HARVESTING 1975-76 SEASON RECENTLY; DELAYED AND FITFUL RAINY SEASON PROBABLY HAS POSTPONED NORMAL PEAK OF HARVEST BY SEVERAL WEEKS UNTIL FINAL QUARTER 1975.

2. SPORADIC RAINFALL REDUCED PACIFIC COAST HARVEST, WHICH

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PAGE 02 GUATEM 04252 111831Z

PROBABLY WILL CONSTITUTE ABOUT 20 PERCENT IN TOTAL. IT IS

UNLIKELY TO MOVE OUT OF OWN PRODUCTION AREA, AS THERE WILL BE NO MORE THAN ENOUGH FOR COAST RESIDENTS AND COFFEE GROWERS WHO PAY MIGRANT LABOR IN PART WITH CORN.

3. EXCELLENT CORN CURRENTLY IS KNEE-HIGH IN CENTRAL AND WESTERN HIGHLANDS. MOISTURE IS GOOD AND PROMISES ABOUT 18 PERCENT OF HARVEST WITH PEAK DUE ABOUT NOVEMBER. NORTH-CENTRAL HIGHLAND CORN, NEARLY 20 PERCENT OF TOTAL, HAS BEEN AFFECTED BY MOISTURE SHORTAGE AND WILL NOT BE HARVESTED BEFORE DECEMBER-JANUARY.

4. PETEN AREA SHOULD ACCOUNT FOR REMAINDER OF HARVEST. NEW FARM SETTLEMENTS THERE HAD BEEN EXPECTED TO BOOST NATIONAL CORN TOTAL AS RESULT OF LIBERAL CREDIT FACILITIES AND STRONG TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, BUT SERIOUS LACK OF MOISTURE HAS REDUCED EXPECTATIONS BY 50 PERCENT. POPULATION CENTERS ELSEWHERE WILL RECEIVE LESS PETEN CORN THAN HOPED-FOR BECAUSE OF GREAT DISTANCES AND BECAUSE NORTHWEST HIGHLANDS AROUND HUEHUETENANGO WILL SYPHON OFF CONSIDERABLE VOLUME; SMALL PLANTINGS IN LAST AREA DRIED UP BEFORE FLOWERING. ALSO DROUGH-AFFLICTED ARE PLANTINGS ON CENTRAL AND EASTERN MOUNTAIN SLOPES AND VALLEYS. SMALL AMOUNT IN FEW IRRIGATED VALLEYS IS PROGRESSING NICELY BUT WILL NOT REACH MARKET UNTIL OCTOBER-NOVEMBER.

5. FOR PAST WEEK OR SO, RAINFALL HAS BEEN GENERALLY GOOD OVER MOST OF GUATEMALA. IF IT CONTINUES, 1975-76 PRODUCTION MAY REACH 770,000 MT LEVEL OR 10 PERCENT MORE THAN ESTIMATED 698,000 TONS IN 74-75. BUT SINCE HARVEST WILL NOT PEAK UNTIL END OF 1975 AND STOCKS ARE LOW AT THIS TIME, ADDITIONAL IMPORTS OF FROM 30,000 TO 50,000 TONS MAY BE NECESSARY. THIS AMOUNT WOULD MEET CONSUMER NEEDS AND LEAVE ENOUGH CARRYOVER TO AVERT FURTHER SHORTAGES.

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